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B1, 1.4(D)

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	PM-01	PRS-01	P-01	SNP-01	SP-01	SSO-00	SS-01
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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 8053
INFO USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM
ARA COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 01196

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PREL, ASEC, CASC, PGOV, MARR, VE
SUBJECT: CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE AND OTHER EARLY INDICATIONS
OF POST-COUP OPINION AMONG POLITICAL LEADERS

REF: CARACAS 01156 AND PREVIOUS

1. C - ENTIRE TEXT

2. SUMMARY: CONGRESS DEBATED THE FEBRUARY 4 COUP ATTEMPT
ON THE AFTERNOON OF THAT SAME DAY, AFTER APPROVING CAP'S
DECREE TEMPORARILY SUSPENDING CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES
AND A MOTION CONDEMNING THE UPRISING. THE DEBATE REVEALED

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UNANIMOUS PARTY SUPPORT OF THE PRESIDENT AND DEMOCRACY AND
CONDEMNATION OF THE COUP ATTEMPT, BUT SEVERAL INDIVIDUAL
INTERVENTIONS, ESPECIALLY FORMER PRESIDENT CALDERA'S,
STRUCK DISCORDANT NOTES. IN LINKING THE COUP ATTEMPT TO
THE COUNTRY'S VARIOUS PROBLEMS, CALDERA LEFT THE
IMPRESSION THAT HE WAS EITHER PARTIALLY JUSTIFYING IT OR
ATTEMPTING TO MAKE CRUDE POLITICAL PROPAGANDA ON BEHALF OF
HIS OWN PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS OUT OF A NATIONAL TRAGEDY.
ALTHOUGH IT IS TOO EARLY TO SAY HOW HIS INTERVENTION WILL
AFFECT THE PUBLIC, IT IS ALREADY APPARENT THAT HE
ALIENATED MANY COLLEAGUES. SEN. MORALES BELLO, THE NEXT

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: OSCAR J OLSON
CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)
DECLASSIFY AFTER: 4 FEB 2012
DATE/CASE ID: 21 JUL 2006 200503206

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LIKELY PRESIDENT OF THE CONGRESS, RESPONDED FORCEFULLY TO CALDERA'S WORDS. IN SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION WITH EMBASSY, MORALES PREDICTED THAT PEREZ WOULD NOT/NOT CHANGE HIS ECONOMIC POLICIES IN RESPONSE TO THE COUP OR TO THE CRITICISM OF FIGURES LIKE CALDERA; NOR, MORALES ADDED, SHOULD HE DO SO. END SUMMARY.

CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE OF COUP ATTEMPT

3. CONGRESS MET EARLY IN THE AFTERNOON OF FEBRUARY 4 TO APPROVE PRESIDENT PEREZ' DECREE TEMPORARILY SUSPENDING TEN CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES AND TO PASS A MOTION INTRODUCED BY AD CONDEMNING THE COUP ATTEMPT. ALTHOUGH THERE WAS NO DEBATE ON THESE MEASURES, WHICH PASSED ALMOST UNANIMOUSLY, FORMER PRESIDENT RAFAEL CALDERA'S INTERVENTION FOLLOWING THE VOTING BEGAN A CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE COUP ATTEMPT.

CALDERA'S INTERVENTION

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4. CALDERA BEGAN BY NOTING THAT HE HAD ABSTAINED ON THE VOTES IN QUESTION OWING TO CERTAIN RESERVATIONS, INCLUDING THAT OCCASIONED BY THE MOTION'S REFERENCE TO PAST RATHER THAN TO PRESENT EVENTS, AND TO (HIS) DOUBT THAT THE PERPETRATORS OF THE ATTEMPTED COUP HAD REALLY WANTED TO MURDER PRESIDENT PEREZ. HASTENING TO ADD THAT THE ATTEMPTED COUP SHOULD BE CONDEMNED, CALDERA ADDED THAT IT WOULD BE INGENUOUS TO INTERPET IT AS SIMPLY THE ACT OF AMBITIOUS MILITARY MEN ACTING IN ISOLATION. RATHER, CALDERA INSISTED, THE ATTEMPTED COUP HAD TO BE INTERPRETED AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE COUNTRY'S GRAVE SITUATION. WHEREAS BEFORE FEBRUARY, 1989, VENEZUELA HAD FUNCTIONED AS THE "SHOWCASE OF LATIN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY," THAT YEAR'S POPULAR RIOTS AND THIS YEAR'S COUP ATTEMPT HAD REVEALED THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND REALITY.

5. CALDERA CITED FOUR MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE VENEZUELAS OF 1958 AND OF 1992: THE POLITICIANS HAD FORGOTTEN THEIR MAIN DUTY, STRENGTHENING THE COUNTRY'S INSTITUTIONS; THE BUSINESS CLASS HAD BECOME MORE SELFISH; THE ARMED FORCES HAD LOST THE CONVICTION THAT OBEDIENCE TO CIVIL AUTHORITY WAS THEIR CHIEF RESPONSIBILITY; AND THE PEOPLE NO LONGER DEFENDED DEMOCRACY WITH ENTHUSIASM AND FERVOR. ACCORDINGLY, HE CONTINUED, THE COUNTRY DID NOT

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WANT TO HEAR THE MESSAGE OF THIRTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, BUT
RATHER A NEW ONE, IN TURN THE PRODUCT OF A NATIONAL
EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE.

6. IT WAS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL POLITICIANS, BUT
ESPECIALLY OF THE PRESIDENT, CALDERA WENT ON, TO OFFER THE
"PROFOUND RECTIFICATIONS" WHICH THE COUNTRY URGENTLY
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NEEDED. CALDERA CONTINUED THAT THE PRESIDENTS OF THE
DEVELOPED COUNTRIES OUGHT TO REALIZE THAT DEMOCRACY CANNOT
EXIST WHERE PEOPLE GO HUNGRY, AND THAT SUCH PROBLEMS AS
THE FOREIGN DEBT, CORRUPTION AND DETERIORATING PUBLIC
SERVICES HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO POPULAR DISSATISFACTION. "IT
IS NOT THAT I AM SAYING THAT THE COUP ATTEMPT OCCURRED
BECAUSE OF THESE PROBLEMS, BUT THAT THEY SERVED AS A BASE
OR PRETEXT FOR WHAT HAPPENED. I CALL ON THE PRESIDENT OF
THE REPUBLIC TO CONFRONT THIS SITUATION."

MORALES BELLO'S RESPONSE

7. FORMER PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS DAVID MORALES BELLO (WHO

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 CARACAS 01196

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
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IS EXPECTED TO BE ELECTED PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS AGAIN,
WHEN THE REGULAR SESSIONS BEGIN IN MARCH) RESPONDED TO
CALDERA ON BEHALF OF DEMOCRATIC ACTION (AD). MORALES
BELLO REJECTED CALDERA'S ASSERTION THAT THE MOTION
CONDEMNING THE COUP WAS DEFICIENT OWING TO ITS REFERENCES
TO PAST RATHER THAN TO PRESENT EVENTS. ZULIA STATE
GOVERNOR OSWALDO ALVAREZ PAZ WAS STILL BEING HELD PRISONER
BY THE REBELS, AND THE CITY OF VALENCIA WAS STILL A
BATTLEGROUND, MORALES BELLO MAINTAINED. MORALES BELLO
ALSO QUESTIONED CALDERA'S EXPRESSION OF DOUBT ABOUT THE
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REBELS' INTENTION TO MURDER PRESIDENT PEREZ, CITING THE
ASSAULT ON THE PRESIDENTIAL RESIDENCE AND THEIR FAILURE TO
HAVE ACTED DURING HIS RECENT TRIP TO EUROPE AS EVIDENCE IN
THIS REGARD. MORALES BELLO THEN ADDRESSED THE COUP
ATTEMPT ITSELF, LABELLING ITS PERPETRATORS "TRAITORS."
"DEATH TO THE COUP-MAKERS," MORALES BELLO EXCLAIMED,
ADDING THAT HE WHO TRIED TO ADDUCE ANY JUSTIFICATION FOR
THE COUP ATTEMPT WAS "WALKING ON THE EDGE OF A RAZOR
BLADE. WE CANNOT ENGAGE IN GRAVE CONTRADICTIONS," HE
CONCLUDED.

8. DURING A FEBRUARY 5 CONVERSATION WITH POLCOUNS,
MORALES BELLO TLKED FURTHER ABOUT THE COUP AND WHAT IT
MEANT OR SHOULD MEAN FOR GOV POLICY. HE REJECTED
CALDERA'S ANALYSIS ABSOLUTELY. VENEZUELA HAD PAID A PRICE
FOR ECONOMIC CHANGE, BUT NOW THE COUNTRY WAS CLOSE TO
"HARVESTING THE FRUITS". PRESIDENT PEREZ, IN MORALES
BELLO'S VIEW, IS FUNDAMENTALLY "VERY DETERMINED" TO LEAVE
BEHIND A LEGACY THAT CANNOT READILY BE REVERSED BY HIS
SUCCESSOR. THEREFORE, MORALES CONTINUED, HE DID NOT

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BELIEVE THAT CAP WOULD MAKE ANY SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN ECONOMIC POLICIES AT THIS TIME. BY OBJECTIVE JUDGMENT, HE ADDED, THERE IS NO NEED FOR CHANGES. THE POLICIES ARE WORKING.

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MORALES

ADDED THAT HE WAS IN FULL AGREEMENT WITH THE PRESIDENT'S ATTITUDE. MORALES CLOSED BY EXPRESSING WARM THANKS FOR
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THE "VERY HELPFUL, VERY FRIENDLY" ATTITUDE TAKEN DURING THE CRISIS BY THE USG, AND ESPECIALLY FOR PRESIDENT BUSH'S TELEPHONE CALL AND HIS FIRM PUBLIC STATEMENT. (COMMENT: MORALES HAS BEEN CONSIDERED A FAIRLY CONVENTIONAL AD POLITICIAN, BY NO MEANS ONE OF THE ECONOMIC TECHNOCRATS. HIS FORTHRIGHT VIEW OF THE NEED TO "STAY THE COURSE" ON ECONOMIC POLICY IS ALL THE MORE INTERESTING AND POSSIBLY SIGNIFICANT, FOR THAT REASON.)

HILARION CARDOZO'S WORDS

9. COPEI PRESIDENT HILARION CARDOZO THEN INTERVENED ON BEHALF OF HIS PARTY. BEGINNING BY DEFENDING CALDERA, CARDOZO SAID THAT HE "HAD BEEN CLEAR AND DECISIVE IN CONDEMNING THE COUP." CARDOZO THEN EXPRESSED HIS PARTY'S FULL SUPPORT OF PRESIDENT PEREZ AND VENEZUELAN DEMOCRACY. CARDOZO INSISTED THAT THE COUP HAD OCCURRED AGAINST A CERTAIN BACKGROUND BUT OFFERED TO POSTPONE DEBATE ON THAT POINT TO ANOTHER DAY. BUT, CARDOZO INSISTED, PRESIDENT PEREZ OUGHT TO SEEK NATIONAL UNDERSTANDING AT THIS JUNCTURE. CARDOZO QUALIFIED MORALES BELLO'S EXPRESSION OF CONDEMNATION TO "DOWN WITH THE COUP-MAKERS" AND REITERATED COPEI'S DEMOCRATIC VOCATION. "WE BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE OTHER DEMOCRATS BESIDES US, BUT THAT NO ONE ELSE IS MORE DEMOCRATIC THAN WE ARE."

CAUSA R AND COMMUNIST PARTY STATEMENTS

10. CAUSA R (LEFTIST) REPRESENTATIVE ARISTOBULO ISTURIZ CHARGED THAT THE CONGRESSMEN HAD FALLEN INTO THE TRADITIONAL VENEZUELAN TRAP OF CONSENSUS IN APPROVING THE
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MOTION OF CONDEMNATION OF THE COUP ATTEMPT WITHOUT
DEBATE. COUPS COULD ALSO OCCUR THROUGH VOTES, HE SAID,
CITING THE PRIVATIZATION OF STATE TELEPHONE COMPANY CANTV
LAST YEAR AS AN EXAMPLE. HE ALSO MAINTAINED THAT THE
POLITICAL CLASS' LACK OF AUTHENTICITY PREVENTED IT FROM
SUSTAINING A DIALOGUE WITH THE PEOPLE. THIS ABSENCE OF
DIALOGUE, IN TURN, MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO CALL ON THE
PEOPLE FOR SUPPORT IN EMERGENCIES. ISTURIZ ALSO ANNOUNCED
THAT HIS PARTY REFUSED TO SUPPORT THE SUSPENSION OF
CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES OWING TO THE DANGER THAT IT
WOULD LEAD TO OUTSIDE INTERVENTION TO SETTLE THE TEACHERS'
STRIKE. THE LONE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCV) REPRESENTATIVE,
RICARDO GUTIERREZ, ALSO SPOKE OUT, CONDEMNING THE COUP
ATTEMPT.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 CARACAS 01196

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RODRIGUEZ ITURBE RESPONDS FOR COPEI

11. CHAIRMAN OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES' FOREIGN AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE JOSE RODRIGUEZ ITURBE RESPONDED TO ISTURIZ.
RODRIGUEZ ITURBE INSISTED THAT THE PROBLEM WAS NOT
CONSENSUS, SINCE UNANIMITY WAS NOT UNIFORMITY AND NO
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DEPUTY RELINQUISHED HIS CITIZENSHIP BY VIRTUE OF HIS
STATUS. FURTHERMORE, RODRIGUEZ ITURBE OBSERVED, THE CAUSA
R DEPUTY HAD BEEN TRYING TO COMPARE DISPARATE THINGS.
"LAST NIGHT'S ATTEMPTED COUP," HE SAID, "WAS NOT
COMPARABLE TO CANTV." RATHER, RODRIGUEZ ITURBE CONCLUDED,
WHAT WAS AT STAKE WAS CONSENSUS IN DEFENSE OF A SYSTEM
WHICH EVERY CONGRESSMAN, EVEN ISTURIZ, SUPPORTED.

MAS' INTERVENTION

12. MOVEMENT TOWARDS SOCIALISM (MAS) WHIP LUIS MANUEL
ESCULPI UNEQUIVOCALLY CONDEMNED THE COUP ATTEMPT IN THE
NAME OF HIS PARTY AND PLEDGED ITS SUPPORT OF THE
PRESIDENT. MENTIONING MAS' VOTE FOR THE SUSPENSION OF
CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES, ESCULPI NOTED PRESIDENT PEREZ'
STATEMENT THAT IT WOULD LAST AS SHORT A TIME AS POSSIBLE.

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